Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (canceled)

2. (currently amended) A picture coding method as claimed in claim ~~1~~ 22 wherein: said predetermined target ~~value of the remaining coded picture~~ code amount is determined based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge as to whether or not a next picture is coded.

3. (currently amended) A picture coding method as claimed in claim ~~1~~ 22 wherein: said predetermined target ~~value of the remaining coded picture~~ code amount is determined based upon the reference target code amount.

4. (currently amended) A picture coding method as claimed in any one of claims ~~1~~ 22, 2 or ~~to~~ 3 wherein: a frame rate of an inputted picture is measured; and said reference coding frame rate is determined based on said measured frame rate.

5. (original) A picture coding method as claimed in claim 4 wherein: said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said measured frame rate.

6. (original) A picture coding method as claimed in claim 4 wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within a constant time.

7. (original) A picture coding method as claimed in claim 6 wherein: in the case that said reference coding frame rate is updated based upon the average value of the measured frame rates within said constant time, when a reference coding frame rate before being updated is larger than a reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used as the reference coding frame rate after being updated.

8. (currently amended) A picture coding apparatus for coding an inputted image to output a compression picture signal, comprising:

a rate control unit ~~having a function capable of~~ <u>for calculating a target code amount</u> ~~adjusting a code amount~~ generated <u>for</u> every picture of said inputted image, ~~which is~~ to be coded; and

an output buffer ~~having a function capable of~~ <u>for</u> storing ~~thereinto~~ a generated code until said ~~stored~~ <u>generated</u> code is outputted from the picture coding apparatus; wherein~~:~~

said rate control unit controls ~~the~~ <u>a coding</u> rate in such a manner that [[a]] <u>the</u> target code amount ~~of said picture to be coded~~ is <u>automatically</u> calculated by adding a correction value to a reference target code amount which is approximately constant<u>; and wherein</u>

<u>an amount of the</u> generated code ~~amount~~ of said picture to be coded is approximated to said <u>calculated</u> target code amount; <u>and also wherein</u>

said reference target code amount is calculated based upon a reference coding frame rate;

and <u>further wherein</u>

said correction value is calculated based upon a difference between a predetermined target value and an actual value of a buffer ~~remaining amount corresponding to~~ a code amount ~~left~~ <u>stored</u> in said output buffer.

9. (currently amended) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in claim 8 wherein: said predetermined target value ~~of the buffer remaining amount~~ is determined based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge as to whether or not a next picture is coded.

10. (currently amended) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in claim 8 wherein: said predetermined target value ~~of the remaining buffer amount~~ is determined based upon the reference target code amount.

11. (original) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 10, further comprising:

measuring means for measuring a frame rate of said inputted image; and wherein:

said reference coding frame rate is determined based on said measured frame rate.

12. (original) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in claim 11 wherein: said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said measured frame rate.

13. (original) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in claim 11 wherein: said reference

coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within

a constant time.

14. (original) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in claim 13 wherein: in the case that

said reference coding frame rate is updated based upon the average value of the measured frame

rates within said constant time, when a reference coding frame rate before being updated is larger

than a reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding

frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used

as the reference coding frame rate after being updated.

15. (currently amended) An image relaying apparatus, comprising:

an image receiving unit to receive an image from an external image transmission unit,

an image transmission unit to transmit an image to an external image receiving unit, and

a picture coding unit[[,]] for converting an image in a first image format received from the

external transmission unit to a second image format suitable for the external receiving unit and

also for transmitting said image in the second image format to the external receiving unit, wherein

the picture coding unit comprises: comprising:

a rate control unit having a function capable of for calculating a target code

amount adjusting a code amount generated for every picture of an inputted image,

which is to be coded; and

an output buffer having a function capable of for storing thereinto a generated

code until said stored generated code is outputted from the picture coding

apparatus; wherein[[:]]

said rate control unit controls ~~the~~ a coding rate in such a manner that [[a]] the target code amount ~~of said picture to be coded~~ is automatically calculated by adding a correction value to a reference target code amount which is approximately constant; and wherein

an amount of the generated code ~~amount~~ of said picture to be coded is approximated to said calculated target code amount; and also wherein

said reference target code amount is calculated based upon a reference coding frame rate; and further wherein

said correction value is calculated based upon a difference between a predetermined target value and an actual value of a buffer ~~remaining amount~~ ~~corresponding to~~ a code amount ~~left~~ stored in said output buffer.

16. (original) An image relaying apparatus as claimed in claim 15 wherein: said predetermined target value of the buffer remaining amount is determined based upon a frame-skipping threshold value corresponding to a threshold value used to judge as to whether or not a next picture is coded.

17. (original) An image relaying apparatus as claimed in claim 15 wherein: said predetermined target value of the remaining buffer amount is determined based upon the reference target code amount.

18. (original) An image relaying apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 15 to 17, the

picture coding unit further comprising: measuring means for measuring a frame rate of said inputted image; and wherein: said reference coding frame rate is determined based on said measured frame rate.

19. (original) An image relaying apparatus as claimed in claim 18 wherein said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon a maximum value of said measured frame rate.

20. (original) A picture coding apparatus as claimed in claim 18 wherein: said reference coding frame rate is determined based upon an average value of said measured frame rates within a constant time.

21. (original) An image relaying apparatus as claimed in claim 20 wherein in the case that said reference coding frame rate is updated based upon the average value of the measured frame rates within said constant time, when a reference coding frame rate before being updated is larger than a reference coding frame rate after being updated, a value between said reference coding frame rate before being updated and said reference coding frame rate after being updated is used as the reference coding frame rate after being updated.

22. (new) A picture coding method including the steps of:

providing a reference coding frame rate;

providing a predetermined target code amount of a coded picture to be stored in a buffer in an apparatus;

calculating a substantially constant reference target code amount from said reference

coding frame rate;

determining a buffer remaining amount of a coded picture stored in said buffer and not yet

outputted by the apparatus;

calculating a correction code amount based on a difference between said predetermined

target code amount and said buffer remaining amount; and

automatically calculating an allocation code amount for every picture to be coded by

adding said correction code amount to said reference target code amount.

23. (new) The method of claim 22, wherein said calculated target code amount is used to

maintain said actual coded amount stored in the buffer near said predetermined target code

amount.